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Background Statement

It’s always fun reflecting back on personal memories from growing up. Starting back when I was in kindergarten I can remember how much I loved going to school. I would play games with my teachers and run around on the playground with my friends. Friends that I no longer have any communication with, and if I saw them today I probably wouldn't even recognize them. Growing up I saw school as a social environment with friends, teachers, and administration. It was hard to grasp the true meaning of education in elementary, middle or even high school. My idea of school was a place to go where I could play sports and get good enough grades to go to college. It was then in college that I finally realized what the power of good education can do for individuals confidence, happiness, and ability.

Having gone to Oxford Hills Comprehensive High School I consider myself lucky. Lucky to have an educational system that truly cares to see all their students succeed, by holding each students to a higher standard. Starting in the middle school we were always provided with laptops each year. Teachers would try to incorporate laptops into each lessons so we would become familiar with technology. Also, when I was in high school the grading system changed. Oxford Hills went to a system without D’s. We were required to get an A, B, or C in all of our classes, and each of the standards in those classes. For example a student could have an overall B, but if they were not passing a specific topic, they would be considered failing. This shows that Oxford Hills held each student to a high standard in the classroom.

Thinking back to the collaboration between parents, teachers, administration, and students it is hard to identify the true role of parents and students. In elementary school my parents went to all of the parent/teacher conferences. As I got older my parents didn't go to those as much. Mostly because at that age kids don’t want their parents going into the school with them. My role as a student was always to impress my parents. I would not want to let them down with failing grade or trouble at school. Also, sports played a critical role in me working hard and staying on the right path. One thing that I wish I had realized then was the idea that school was to better MY knowledge. Reflecting back I noticed that I worked hard for my parents and sports but never had myself in mind. I’m sure that I am not the first person to make this mistake, all students need to know how powerful a authentic education can be for them.

At UMF, learning about how teachers can make a difference using differentiated instruction and meaningful relationships makes it is exciting to think back to those experiences I had with teachers as a student. I can think back to when I was a ninth grader in Mrs. T’s class. We were reading the old english poem beowulf. For a project on that book we had to create an eye movie that acted out the entire book. In the movie we also had to rap about what was happening in each scene. I can remember it like it was yesterday, I was sitting at my kitchen table rapping about a book, that I hated, having a great time. I forgot it was a school assignment because I was so engaged in the activity. This was a great example of how teachers can get student engaged and excited to learn. Then when I as in the tenth grade I had Mr. Pinto. Mr. Pinto was the teacher I got my inspiration from to become an educator. He was not only a role model, but helped me apply to college and make a decision on where to go to better my future. The relationship that I had with Mr. Pinto was so important to my success in high school and that is what I want to provide to my future students.

Many times people ask me why do you want to teach? I always think back to Mr. Pinto and how I want to make a difference is a student's life. Also, I’m tired of hearing false statements about how mathematics is a subject that students either know or they will never understand. This idea was developed because teachers struggle to connect with students when teaching math at an early age. All students know how to read and write, so they can do math as long as they believe it. Students that label themselves as ‘the ones that don’t understand’ will never be successful in math. Teaching math can’t continue to be the boring process of teachers giving students formulas and definitions to learn. Math is not meant to be learned with memorization and pointless formula calculations. Math is real, exciting, and all around us and teachers need to show that. After taking math methods I have learn about many different ways of exploring mathematics. Mathematics is filled with manipulative based discovery that is all around us.

When I was in middle and high school I made the mistake of doing my work for others rather than myself. As a teacher I want to reach students before they make that mistake, give them a chance to realize how important a good education can be. Being a teacher like Mr. Pinto was for me can make a difference in a kid's life. Teachers need to educate students not only on specific material but also the importance of “why”. Many students struggle understanding why school, and math specifically, is important. In class you get the question, when are we going to use this in real life? By creating a lesson like Mrs. T did for me it will engage and eliminate the questions on why. School will then remind them of the good old days in kindergarten, when they enjoyed going to class everyday to learn and see their teacher and friends.

Thinking back to my middle school experience I can think of an example of how I wanted good grades, but not for myself. Relating it back to how students at that age have a greater capacity to critically think, it can also get them in trouble. In middle school and today, I am not particularly fond of reading, so if I am given the chance to get out of it, I will. My friends and I in middle school decided to help each other cheat our way through quizzes that we had to take after reading a book. We noticed that each of the test, specific to each book, always had the same questions in the same order. We would then each read one book and take the test for each other, so we would get the points for three books instead of one. As a group we would carefully check out each book in the library and wait a while to take the quiz, so it looked like we were actually reading. After getting away with this for two or three months we finally were caught. The moral of the story is that we used teamwork and organization but for the wrong reasons. As a teacher we need to channel that teamwork towards building an authentic learning experience rather than getting in trouble. This is an example of how I was trying to get good grades for the wrong reasons. I truly believe that if students know how powerful an education can be we can eliminate trouble like this.

Teaching is not always a fun job. In high school I had an english teacher come in when I was a senior and teach for the first time. She was quiet and didn't really know how to take control of her class. All the students got on her about how they didn’t like any of her assignments and after that first year she ended up leaving Oxford Hills. Students got on her so much that she had to leave because she couldn't take it anymore. I guess the one fear that I have as a teacher would be disrespect from my students. Taking control and being a leader is step one in getting rid of this problem. Once students know you are serious about learning, you can then start to have some fun.

Overall I had a good time thinking back to my career as a student. I made a few mistakes growing up because I never learned why school was important. When I have a class of my own I hope I can prevent my students from making the same mistakes. I’m beyond excited to start my teaching career.